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ABSTRACT

A questionnaire requesting subjects to rank 16 occupations according to "how you perceive their social standing" (prestige ranking) was administered to 154 undergraduate students. From an analysis of the rankings, students were labeled Traditional (N=73) and Non-Traditional (N=74) and were then compared on demographic and attitudinal variables. Non-Traditional students tended to rank the skilled trades higher in prestige than did Traditional students. Analysis of variance indicated that Traditional students, compared to Non-Traditional students, were more interested in career advancement and high initial and anticipated future earnings, but were less concerned with (1) having an impact on society, (2) the need for intellectual challenges or interactions, or (3) financing their education. No significant main effect or interactions due to sex were found, nor were there significant demographic differences between the two groups. The implications of possible shifts in what has been an extremely stable occupational prestige hierarchy and related issues are discussed. Three tables show student rankings and means and standard deviations for the two groups. (TA)

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CAREER ATTITUDES RELATED TO TRADITIONAL AND NON-TRADITIONAL VIEWS OF OCCUPATIONAL PRESTIGE

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Summary

University students labeled Traditional (N=73) and Non-Traditional (N=74) in their rankings of occupations were compared on demographic and attitudinal variables. Non-Traditional students tended to rank the skilled trades higher in prestige than did Traditional students. Analyses of Variance (F.05) indicated that Traditional students, compared to Non-Traditional students, were more interested in career advancement, high initial and anticipated future earnings, but were less concerned with having an impact on society, the need for intellectual challenges or interactions, or financing their education. No significant main effect or interactions due to sex were found. There were no significant demographic differences between the two groups. The implications of possible shifts in what has been an extremely stable occupational prestige hierarchy and related issues were discussed.

Several studies have shown that the occupational prestige hierarchy has remained extremely stable over a period of years (Deeg & Patterson, 1947; Hakel, Hollman & Dunette, 1968; Hodge, Siegel & Rossi, 1964; Hutson, 1962; Medvene & Collins, 1974). These studies have consistently demonstrated that the professions and higher level business occupations receive the highest prestige ranks, skilled trades and technical occupations receive intermediate ranks, and semi and unskilled occupations receive low ranks. Hence it would seem that occupational prestige has traditionally been associated with the amount of income, power and education that an occupation represents.

Recently, however, Yankelovich (1974) has noted that jobs are being viewed as having less intrinsic prestige. He attributes this change to the changing definition of success. Whereas "success" used to mean money, power and prestige, "ideas of success are now beginning to revolve around various forms of self-fulfillment" (Yankelovich, 1974, p. 81). Yankelovich has therefore predicted that "the idea that all jobs possess inherent dignity will wane and the occupational structure (will therefore) lose some of its hierarchical character" (p. 87).

The purpose of the present study was to obtain a sample of university students' prestige rankings of 16 occupations, to compare these rankings with the results of previous research, and to examine the relationship of prestige rankings to educational and career attitudes.

Method

Instrument

Data were gathered with an anonymous questionnaire which requested that subjects rank 16 occupations according to "how you perceive their social standing". This list consisted of 12 occupations from previous studies (Hakel et al, 1968; Medvene & Collins, 1974): Army Captain, Banker, Carpenter, Civil Engineer,

Electrician, Elementary School Teacher, Farmer/Forester, Foreign Missionary, Insurance Agent, Lawyer, Physician and School Superintendent. Four other occupations were added by the present investigators: Artisan-Craftsman/woman, Artist-Writer-Composer, Journalist, and Professional Athlete. Also included on the questionnaire were several multiple choice and Likert items pertaining to subjects' demographic characteristics and educational and career attitudes.

Subjects

The questionnaire was administered to 154 undergraduate students (103 females, 51 males) enrolled at the University of Maryland, College Park. Subjects were solicited from an undergraduate psychology course and were given course credit for their participation. Subjects' ages ranged from 17 to 64, with a median and modal age of 20. They were mostly white (89%), in their second (35%) or third (30%) year of college, and majoring in the behavioral and social sciences (36%).

Results

Occupational Rankings

Analysis of subjects' prestige rankings of the 16 occupations revealed distinct bimodal distributions for a majority (11) of the occupations. This kind of distribution of responses was most pronounced for the occupation "Banker", with 48% of the sample ranking it between 1 and 9 and 52% ranking it between 10 and 16. The first group of 73 subjects had a rank of 4 for Banker, which was similar to the rank that his occupation has received in previous studies (Hakel et al, 1968; Medvene & Collins, 1974). This group of subjects was subsequently labeled as "Traditional". The second group of 79 subjects was found to have a rank of 13 for Banker and was labeled as "Non-Traditional".

Table 1 shows that Traditional and Non-Traditional subjects ranked the professions (Physician, Lawyer, Journalist) highest and that differences occurred in the two groups' intermediate and low rankings. Middle level business and professional jobs (School Superintendent, Professional Athlete, Army Captain, Insurance Agent) were given intermediate (7, 10, 11, and 12.5 respectively) ranks by the Traditional group and the lowest (12, 14, 15, and 16 respectively) ranks by the Non-Traditional group. The converse was true for Foreign Missionary and the skilled trades (Artisan-Craftsman/woman, Carpenter, Farmer/Forester), with the Non-Traditional group giving intermediate ranks (7, 8, 10, and 10 respectively) and the Traditional group giving the lowest ranks (14, 12.5, 16 and 15 respectively) to these occupations.

Demographic Characteristics

Chi Square analyses (.05 level) revealed no significant differences in the Traditional and Non-Traditional groups' demographic characteristics. The two groups were nearly equivalent in terms of sexual composition and students' year of study. There was, however, a strong trend (p .07) towards Non-Traditional students, more than Traditional students, having sources of income other than their parents (scholarship, loan, benefits or employment), (Non-Traditional, 71%; Traditional, 54%), and a moderate trend toward Non-Traditionals having (1) higher degree aspirations (M.A. and doctorate) (Non-Traditional, 71%; Traditional 56%: p .25), and (2) a desire to live away from the geographical area of the University after graduation (Non-Traditional, 48%; Traditional, 37%: p .35).

Reasons for Occupational Choice

Traditional and Non-Traditional students were significantly different in the importance they attached to 4 of 11 reasons for choosing a particular career (Table 2). Traditional students regarded (1) the possibility of rapid career advancement, (2) high initial earnings, and (3) high anticipated future

earnings as significantly (F at .05) more important in the choice of an occupation than did Non-Traditional students. Non-Traditional students, on the other hand, saw it as more important (F at .05) that they be able to contribute to or have an impact on society.

Educational and Career Attitudes

The Traditional and Non-Traditional groups gave significantly different (F at .05) responses on 2 of 23 attitude items (Table 3). Students in the Non-Traditional group were significantly more concerned about their ability to finance their college education, and felt significantly more strongly that they have a need for intellectual challenges. The two groups were about equal in (1) their perception of the need for change in people's style of living and patterns of consumption, (2) their belief that hard work will always pay off, and (3) their sense of identification with the University, and the prominence of the University as a source of stimulation.

Some non-significant trends that emerged were as follows: Non-Traditional students expressed less certainty than Traditional students that they could succeed at any job or be able to earn as much money as they wanted, and less confidence in the social and economic health of the country. Non-Traditional students tended to be more certain about their career goals and less interested in changing jobs or careers at a later point in life. While Non-Traditional students tended to agree more that society should place less emphasis on working hard, Traditional students tended to agree more that they would not pursue some occupations because they require too much work or education.

Results of an unweighted means two way analysis of variance showed no differences at .05 by sex or the interaction of sex and Traditional or Non-Traditional grouping.

Discussion

The results of this study give evidence that occupational prestige remains stable at the upper (professional) level of the prestige hierarchy and is becoming less stable at the intermediate and lower levels of the hierarchy among university students. It is possible that the hierarchy has changed substantially for some (Non-Traditional) students and not changed for others (Traditional). To a limited extent, then, the notion presented by Yankelovich (1974), that the occupational prestige hierarchy is becoming less stable, is supported. However, it could also be that there has always been a Non-traditional group but that its size is increasing.

The nature of the prestige hierarchy appears to have changed most as a result of increased prestige which Non-Traditional students associate with the skilled trades. Interestingly, Non-Traditional students, as a group, had higher educational aspirations that did Traditional students. Instead of entering the skilled trades which, against tradition, they viewed as moderately prestigious, Non-Traditional students wanted jobs that would "contribute to and have an impact on society", although the difference was not statistically significant. As a group, Non-Traditional students appear to be headed for high-prestiage, professional jobs that will provide them with independence and an opportunity to work with and implement their ideas. Hence, it might be anticipated that the Non-Traditional students' attitudes will become increasingly influential and that the occupational prestige hierarchy will continue to change as more Non-Traditional students enter the labor force.

It is also interesting that Non-Traditional students showed a strong interest in professional careers and tended to feel that "less emphasis should be

placed on working hard", even though the difference was not statistically significant. Rather than implying a contradiction, this might suggest that Non-Traditional subjects do not view the professions as "work", even though these jobs probably involve a greater time commitment than most other jobs.

In the context of Maslow's (1954) self-actualization model, these results would suggest that Non-Traditional subjects want their jobs to satisfy growth needs (e.g., autonomy, self-expression) while Traditional subjects are motivated toward the satisfaction of safety or deficiency (i.e., monetary) needs.

A notable finding in the study was that there were no sex differences found either as main effects or interactions. Medvene and Collins (1974) support these results in that they found no sex differences in the overall prestige rankings of occupations. They did not study interactions or the attitude dimensions included in the present study. Since sex differences are so commonly found in so many areas of related research it appears worth comment and further research.

Certainly the sample is from one school and one class, but the range on variables such as age, class and major make it difficult to call this a homogeneous group. Perhaps the consistency in occupational prestige rankings over the years by many different groups tends to dominate the additional variables studied. The current study should remind us all that what most of us feel is a desirable occupation remains stable; it is our concept of vocational development toward those occupations that has undergone some change and remains controversial. For instance we agree that being an engineer is prestigious but are more varied in our reactions to a female being an engineer.

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Table 1

Ranks Assigned to Occupations

by Traditional and Non-Traditional Groups

Occupation	Traditional Group Ranks (N = 73)	Non-Traditional Group Ranks (N = 79)
Physician	1	1
Lawyer	2	2
Civil Engineer	3	5
Banker	4	13
Journalist	5	4
Artist-Writer-Composer	6	3
School Superintendent	7	12
Elementary School Teacher	8	6
Electrician	9	10
Professional Athlete	10	14
Army Captain	11	15
Artisan-Craftsman/woman	12.5	8
Insurance Agent	12.5	16
Foreign Missionary	14	7
Farmer/Forester	15	10
Carpenter	16	10

Table 2

Means[1] and Standard Deviations of Reasons for Occupational Choice for Traditional and Non-Traditional Groups

	Traditional Group		Non-Traditional Group	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1. General availability of jobs	2.03	1.20	2.08	1.19
2. Possibility of rapid career advancement	2.23*	1.03	2.58*	1.14
3. High initial earnings	2.56*	1.03	2.94*	1.16
4. High anticipated future earnings	2.15*	0.99	2.60*	1.08
5. Prestige, social status	2.70	1.11	2.77	1.09
6. Opportunity to contribute to or have an impact on society	2.11*	1.09	1.68*	0.93
7. Interest in the field	1.42	0.95	1.31	0.89
8. Independence	1.88	1.02	1.71	0.94
9. Minimal pressure to perform well	2.63	1.20	2.55	1.13
10. Opportunity to work with people	1.67	1.03	1.68	1.05
11. Opportunity to work with ideas	1.93	1.03	1.71	1.02

* = F significant beyond .05

[1] strongly agree = 1, strongly disagree = 5

Table 3

Means[1] and Standard Deviations of

Attitude Items for Traditional and Non-Traditional Groups

	Traditional Group		Non-Traditional Group	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1. I expect to have several different jobs during the course of my adult life.	2.62	1.21	2.52	1.26
2. I know exactly what I want to do after I graduate from college.	2.89	1.28	2.71	1.33
3. My career goals have changed several times.	2.70	1.27	2.87	1.38
4. Hard work will always pay off.	2.73	1.08	2.75	1.10
5. I expect to be able to earn as much money as I want.	3.14	0.96	3.22	1.02
6. I feel that I have the ability to succeed at any job.	2.36	0.97	2.51	1.15
7. I would not pursue some jobs because they require too much work.	3.16	1.15	3.35	1.12
8. I expect to earn more money and live a more comfortable life style than my parents.	2.82	0.97	2.94	1.00
9. I would not pursue some jobs because they require too much education.	3.38	1.34	3.46	1.24
10. Our society should place less emphasis on working hard.	3.31	1.13	3.19	1.09

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Table 3
(Continued)

Means[1] and Standard Deviations of

Attitude Items for Traditional and Non-Traditional Groups

	Traditional Group		Non-Traditional Group	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
11. People's style of living and patterns of consumption will have to change in order for the country to deal effectively with its economic and energy problems.	2.15	1.03	2.14	1.13
12. I feel confident in the social and economic health of this country today.	3.81	0.87	4.03	0.86
13. The financial wealth of this country is equitably distributed among the people.	4.40	0.82	4.39	0.91
14. After several years in one field, I might like to change careers.	2.96	1.03	3.05	1.11
15. If I got up in the morning and didn't feel like working, I would "call in sick".	3.73	0.94	3.73	0.96
16. I expect to live a lifestyle that is similar to my parents'.	2.82	1.11	3.05	1.15
17. I am concerned about my ability to finance my college education.	3.04	1.31*	2.70	1.26
18. I have a need for intellectual challenges.	2.22	0.97*	1.96	0.91
19. I do more work in my classes than is required to get by on.	2.75	1.07	2.57	1.19

Table 3
(Continued)

Means[1] and Standard Deviations of

Attitude Items for Traditional and Non-Traditional Groups

	Traditional Group		Non-Traditional Group	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
20. This university is an important source of stimulation for me.	2.60	1.09	2.55	1.13
21. As a student, I feel a belongingness and sense of identification here.	3.09	1.16	3.06	1.08
22. For me, college is mainly a practical matter; with a college degree I can pursue my career goals.	2.64	1.13	2.76	1.09
23. I suppose I take the practical benefits of college for granted; I am more concerned with less tangible things such as my development as a person.	2.65	0.93	2.67	0.99

* = F significant beyond .05

1 strongly agree = 1, strongly disagree = 5